

CBS NEWS-COLUMBIA DISASTER (12:06 P.M E.T-12:39 P.M E.T) (2-1-2003)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEIz0cXFJB8> (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEIz0cXFJB8>)

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From Saturday, February 1st, 2003 CBS NEWS breaking news coverage of the Columbia Space Shuttle breakup killing the crew of 7. STS-107 was wrapping up a 16 day mission in space, communication was lost at 9:00 A.M E.T, just 16 minutes before landing and breaking up over Texas.

- Coverage runs from 12:06 P.M E.T - 12:39 P.M E.T

THE STS-107 Crew:

Commander: Rick D. Husband

Pilot: William C. McCool

Mission Specialist 1: David M. Brown

Mission Specialist 2: Kalpana Chawla

Mission Specialist 3: Michael P. Anderson

Mission Specialist 4: Laurel B. Clark

Payload Specialist 1: Ilan Ramon

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said that some type of tank ended up on his runway he said he's talking about some sort of tank off an aircraft mr rohner also says that there are pieces of debris all along the entrance road to the nacogdoches airport national guardsman has been called out to protect the debris a search for debris is underway throughout the area east and north of dallas stretching on into at least parts of louisiana gary hunzinger of plano texas said that he saw the shuttle flying overhead he said he saw two bright objects uh flying off east side of it he thought that they might be some sort of pursuit aircraft at first but of course the shuttle was flying at 200 thousand feet plus so there could be no other aircraft up there uh benjamin laster of kemp texas says his barn started shaking and he and his family ran out and started looking around last year said he saw a puff of vapor and smoke and a big chunk of material fall and the situation at this hour is that a senior u.s government official says the space shuttle is quote gone the same official says there's no hope for either the shuttle or its crew of southern the next event in terms of which we hope to have some official information to get perhaps additional facts uh on this disaster scheduled for one o'clock eastern time the rest i'm reminded that ronald reagan president reagan in his speech to the nation on the day the shuttle challenger exploded killing all seven of its astronauts quoted in the following the crew of the space shuttle challenger honored us by the manner in which they live their lives we will never forget them nor the last time we saw them this morning as they prepared for their journey and waved goodbye

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journey and waved goodbye and slipped this early bonds of earth to touch the face of god unquote president ronald reagan with the face challenger eulogy back in the mid 1980s january 28th 1986. bill harvard if you're still with us in florida uh this is a picture of the shuttle challenger exploding sometimes on television it's difficult to tell what's today and what's yesterday this was the shuttle challenger exploding uh just after the commander had given the full throttle forward 73 seconds into the flight it exploded in christ to earth quite a

different situation today these are the old challenger explosion pictures today we have only a few photographs from today high in the sky but this was on dissent the first time that shuttle has had difficulty or certainly anything approaching this kind of difficulty understanding of these pictures from today bill i was going to ask that keeping in mind that challenger uh the challenger shuttle exploded on january 28 1986 and then this happens in early february uh will it will not one of the things to be looking into is is there something especially dangerous we didn't know about we shuttle launches in deep winter even though they're in florida well dan i think in this case i wouldn't think that at all the temperatures here when the shuttle took off and leading up to launch you folks up in new york would probably consider balmy it got a little chilly for us but it it wasn't anywhere near on a level that would affect a piece of aircraft equipment or or even the space shuttle i don't think in this case wintertime was an issue at all i think this was uh whatever happened today was was a mechanical failure of some sort uh that took place and i think the timing is truly coincidental bill the uh columbia was up at two hundred thousand more than two hundred thousand feet today when they lost contact with mission control

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mission control at what point at what altitude potentially does weather become a factor well they have to get much much lower in the atmosphere for that to happen remember in a commercial airline or even the concord which flies up to sixty thousand feet or so fifty or sixty thousand feet they're up above ninety nine percent of the weather i mean there's not much above sixty thousand feet uh maybe a little bit but not much and certainly nothing along uh columbia's track weather becomes an issue when they get down in the manual flying range of 50 000 feet or so they get there just a few minutes before landing literally inside of the runway when they get to that point and as a matter of fact they were worried about winds aloft a little earlier today at that point when the commander rick cousin would have taken over manual control to guide the shuttle but certainly nothing at two hundred thousand feet uh that would that would be an impact i can't imagine what it could be bill harwood uh stick with us down in florida if you will we want to recap now very quickly for those of you who may have joined us in progress the associated press is quoting a senior u.s official is saying now the space shuttle columbia quote is gone uh that same official is quoted as saying that there are no survivors among the astronauts a nasa news conference is now scheduled for one o'clock eastern time at 12 noon uh central time about today's developments mission control lost contact with the shuttle just minutes before it was to land this morning at 9 16 eastern time at the kennedy space center in florida to get the picture it was in rapid descent uh over north texas headed for florida it was due to land in just a matter of minutes given the speed it was traveling when eyewitnesses said they looked up saw it in the sky and then saw what obviously was some breakup nasa immediately declared an emergency scrambled rescue crews from the dallas fort worth area and elsewhere and others are now heading toward eastern texas shuttle debris what's described as shuttle debris has been found in southeast texas in the costa canada nacogdoches area a lot of it is reported to be in and around nacogdoches there's also a report that a piece of debris sparked a fire at an apartment

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debris sparked a fire at an apartment building in plano just north of dallas texas that's being checked and double checked to see in fact whether that fire was started by some kind of falling debris nasa's put out a public advisory to people in texas and elsewhere to avoid any possibly hazardous debris that may have come from the space shuttle we're going to say again some of this debris is toxic if you're in an area and when we said in east texas and elsewhere possibly there's some degree possibly over the texas louisiana line if you're in any place where you think you have seen some of this debris stay clear of it stay away from it president bush he was at camp david in maryland is on his way back to the white house and is receiving updates the flag next to nasa's countdown clock has been lowered to half staff there were seven astronauts aboard including six americans along with the first israeli astronaut partly because of his presence security surrounding this mission was tight but a spokesman for the homeland security department said flatly this morning there's absolutely positively no indication that this even could have been a terrorist incident or that there was any foul play uh involved now on the phone now from new mexico we have colonel mike mullane

former shuttle astronaut on three missions he was once aboard shuttle discovery twice owned shuttle atlantis colonel mulhane thank you for being with us yeah good good morning cam um since you've been there and so few humans ever have described for us as the shuttle is reaching that point where it's in the what's been described as the glide pattern over north texas what the astronauts are feeling and what they're doing at that moment when we come out of orbit we actually start half a world away from our landing site we turn the orbit around and fire the orbit motors for a couple of minutes to slow us down and then turn the orbiter back forward lift the nose up so that the belly is presented to the atmosphere we're coming in about 40 degrees nose high and of course you've got the heat tiles on the belly that are protecting you initially for the first oh probably a good 20 or 30 minutes uh

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probably a good 20 or 30 minutes uh you really don't feel much or see much you're the air is so thin up there we're falling through it it's it's around when you start getting down around that 250 000 foot point you start getting this white hot air wrapped around you you're in the cockpit looking out it's a fantastic light show you can see this white hot glow of the superheated air around the cockpit and the shuttle is just doing these roll maneuvers as it loses energy as it falls toward the landing site it is a autopilot re-entry the pilot can take control at any point they can hot stick they call they grab the stick and they have control of it but there's no reason to do that because you can't see the runway anyway so you might as well just let the autopilot slide so a nominal re-entry it would be on autopilot the crew would be sitting there monitoring the hydraulic system monitoring the navigation system the re-entries that i had were very benign uh very quiet i get a little bit shaken when you get deeper into the atmosphere but it's uh it's not like launch it launches much more dynamic event and re-entry is much more quiet and stable what is the gravest danger on re-entry as one has done it three times tell us what the greatest danger is well obviously you're going from five miles per second in speed 18 000 miles an hour and you're up around 200 miles and you've got to dissipate all of that energy all of that speed and the potential energy they call it the altitude you have to you have to get all that down to zero altitude and zero speed after a 12 000 mile glide halfway around the world and obviously there's a lot of things that could go wrong on something like that hydraulic failures you're dependent upon hydraulic system to operate these flight controls on the shuttle when you get deeper in the atmosphere and higher up you're dependent on steering jets to fire uh to maintain the attitude it's the shuttle has to enter

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shuttle has to enter very very precisely it can't it's not like a fighter jet that you can just kind of fly around at different uh attitudes it's uh very has to be has to come in the atmosphere to very close tolerances in attitude or else aerodynamic failure could occur it could pitch out of control and be destroyed and what would cause that obviously nasa will be looking at that there's many different things that could happen failure the of the steering jets structural failure data processing i mean the heart of the machine is a computer if you have problems with it there's four of them it's unlikely all of them would fail but i mean you could have some type of software error or or computer problem that would pitch the vehicle out of control i mean there's many many different things that could fail that would cause this re-entry to to uh obvious uh to become a disaster and now so i'm sure it's gonna be looking at every possible detail that would cause a problem like that when the space shuttle first re-enters it and it goes into what's called the aura phase where you have this strange mysterious light around it and then you emerge from that as an astronaut were you thinking of possible death well i have to admit uh that uh launch is what most terrified me people ask me was i scared on a shuttle launch and i tell them no i wasn't scared i was terrified and i flew three times i was terrified on the first launch i was terrified on the second launch and i was terrified on the third launch i have to admit that in orbit it's very relaxing i didn't ever feel like my life was imminently at risk when i was in space and re-entry you get your heart rate up a little bit but again i always felt like the chances of something bad happening on re-entry are much less than they are on launch i mean on launch it's a controlled explosion i mean you're converting four million pounds of

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converting four million pounds of propellant in just eight and a half minutes to a speed from that as an astronaut were you thinking of possible death well i have to admit that [Applause] launch is what most terrified me people ask me was i scared on a shuttle launch and i tell them no i wasn't scared i was terrified and i flew three times i was terrified on the first launch i was terrified on the second launch and i was terrified on the third launch i have to admit that in orbit it's very relaxing i didn't ever feel like my life was imminently at risk when i was in space and re-entry you get your heart rate up a little bit but again i always felt like the chances of something bad happening on re-entry are much less than they are on launch i mean on launch it's a controlled explosion i mean you're converting four million pounds of propellant in just eight and a half minutes to a speed of 18 000 miles an hour and an altitude of 100 miles or so that's a huge energy exchange and obviously a lot of bad things can happen on launch and so i was much more apprehensive on my launches than i ever was on my on my re-entry the re-entry is uh very it's not it just doesn't have that dynamic about it not the noise and the shaking and the violence that you have on on on liftoff and on orbit insertion launch you said um colonel mulhane that on reentry that i think your words were it gets your heartbeat up a little is the translations that your heart's pounding like a hammer well it's certainly um it is it is very uh not very but it is uh much more apprehensive you're much more apprehensive on reentry than you are in orbit orbit is relaxing i mean assuming everything is going fine um again i never had any sense that that my life was threatened in in space i know that sounds bizarre probably a lot of people when you consider you're in a vacuum and you're

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consider you're in a vacuum and you're hundreds of miles above the earth but uh it was very relaxing on re-entry you do get more apprehensive but it's not the same as launch at least it wasn't for me now i i realized that you know things could go bad on on re-entry but again it i just didn't have the sense of threat that i did on on launch we're going to put up again the crew photograph for this mission and as we put that photograph up i want you to tell us briefly if you will what it takes how much it takes to be an astronaut well i didn't know any of the people that were lost today on columbia i left the 1990 challenger obviously affected us my group because there were four from challenger were killed from my group all astronauts i think that it's a passion it's something that you want to do so badly that uh you can't turn away from it it's something in your blood i think that describes most astronauts in fact i've told people before that i think the fear of not making the trip far exceeds the fear of dying doing it i know that sounds bizarre but i think people who climb like mountains and mount everest and these other people that do these things that you know it always amazes me i'm not a mountain climber always amazes me that you know how in the world these people do this you know climb up to mount everest and i think about i know how they do it to them it's a passion they have to do it and that's why i think we lost the audio of colonel mahan mulhane from new mexico as he was speaking so eloquently about what it is what it takes to be an astronaut what it drives those who have this passion to go into space as the crew of this general mission did the dateline the kennedy space center quote it's gone that's what a senior u.s

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it's gone that's what a senior u.s official says about space shuttle columbia the shuttle broke apart in flames on its way to landing all seven astronauts on board were killed the official says degrees through across texas and apparently some other states has been positively identified now as being from the shuttle that's why this official can say it's gone the shuttle and that all seven astronauts on board were killed there's yet to be any official word from nasa but this high u.s government store says there is no hope for either the shuttle or its summer member crew but yes we've known that in our hearts and intellectually i guess rush since sometime between nine and ten o'clock that is eastern time but to hear someone in the position of authorities say in it it hits the heart like a sledge uh nasa chief sean o'keefe is meeting with the astronauts families nation's sympathy goes to them in condolences of course the families had been waiting at florida's kennedy space center for this morning's scheduled landing what they hope would be what they believe would be a triumphal return and the news conference is scheduled for one o'clock eastern time television footage has been various television footage showing the bright light of the space shuttle over texas followed by plumes of

smoke streaking through the sky debris seemed to break off into separate balls of light all of this happened just after 9am this morning eastern time when the shuttle was just minutes from landing uh in florida you know russ mitchell sometimes say um after dangerous trips that the most dangerous time is the closest you get to home and so it was today with shuttle

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and so it was today with shuttle columbia the debris is falling throughout north central texas nacogdoches texas seems to be an area where a lot of debris is coming down right now we want to talk to the city manager there victoria lafollette did i say your name right victoria follow it thank you very much for joining us we certainly appreciate it what is going on in your town this morning as we speak this morning central time well obviously we are in an emergency operations mode if we've active emergency management center and we're coordinating with estate and federal officials as we begin to assess how much debris we have in our particular area we do have considerable debris in nacogdoches what are people saying you saying to you that they are discovering pardon me what are people discovering in academics what kind of pieces of debris do they think they're spotting all sorts of pieces we've had pieces on our runway at the airstrip we've had pieces and roadways we've had pieces on top of buildings we've had on people's roofs in yards and fields all sorts of sizes and shapes this level that there are reports that some buildings have caught on fire in nacogdoches since the result of the debris coming down what can you tell us about that we have no fires we've had some damage to some buildings but some of the debris that we were told that came down was still hot but we had not had any major fires of any kind what are you telling residents about this we are very concerned about people touching any of the debris we have told them do not touch it leave it alone we're asking them to notify us at 911 we are having to catalog and keep up with where all the pieces are located and so we're having people contact us to give us that information and then in turn we're sharing that with the appropriate state and federal officials we understand that some of this debris may in fact be debris rather may in fact be toxic what

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debris rather may in fact be toxic what are you hearing from nasa or from officials about what kind of materials we're talking about here uh the last that we've heard we don't believe there's any radioactive materials there are some chemicals that we are concerned about and we are working through the texas department of health to get more information out on that if for some reason someone has come in contact with we're telling them you know for the time being to please you know wash their hands with soap and water or anything they may have touched immediately and i'm sorry man go ahead and that's the main thing the thing we definitely want to get out we do not want people touching anything if it's in a roadway or something take a shovel or something and push it out of the way but do not touch it okay victoria left the ladder sorry the question from russell uh no but we do thank you man this morning john roberts our chief of white house correspondent is at the white house where they've been at least an informal briefing john what have they told you well good afternoon to you dana president bush arrived back here at the white house about a minute ago after the 90-minute trip from camp david where he was supposed to spend the weekend the flags here at the white house just a few minutes ago were lowered to half-mast and the president is expected this afternoon um to make an address to the nation it's quite possible that that will be an address from the oval office uh in a briefing a little while ago we were told that uh president bush talked personally to nasa administrator sean o'keefe nasa has been designated the lead agency in the investigation with which the white house promises is going to be careful and thorough condoleezza rice the national security adviser was up at camp david this morning she preceded the president down here she has been huddled with the national security secretary or the homeland security secretary rather tom ridge who has talked with the governor rick perry of texas to express his condolences and to coordinate recovery efforts he's also talked with the governors of

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he's also talked with the governors of neighboring states to put them on alert because the debris field is so large it's possible that the debris could have crossed state borders as well there have been mid-level uh consultations so far between the united states government and the government of israel uh expresses of uh condolences for the loss of elon ramon the 48 year old fighter pilot who was the first israeli astronaut who was on board the space shuttle and president bush now that he is back at the white house expected to consult with his top advisers and it's expected that he will be making a personal telephone call to israeli prime minister uh ariel sharon to express his condolences personally so what to see from the white house later on today is an address from the president most likely from the oval office but dan i should say that people around here are just uh stunned trying to make sense of what happened uh these things are are typically routine uh the most that anybody watches for is the two sonic booms as the uh the shuttle reenters the atmosphere and puts on that show and then of course the landing no one ever thought that anything like this could happen because there's just been no sense that the the re-entries uh have been anything but routine but as bill harwood was talking about earlier today two hundred thousand feet twelve thousand five hundred miles per hour there's a lot of dynamic pressure on that airframe a lot of heat as it starts to come back into the atmosphere and it's obvious that something went terribly terribly wrong there's been no indication from anyone here at the white house that there was any kind of terrorism involved in fact quite to the contrary they say that there's nothing to suggest that it was terrorism the shuttle was of about 35 to 40 miles high and short of an intercontinental ballistic missile there's not much that would fly that high dam so it's highly unlikely that it would have

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it's highly unlikely that it would have been anything from the ground that was involved and of course the security around the space shuttle all of the systems are checked and triple checked highly unlikely that anything could have been brought on board that would uh have precipitated such an event but this afternoon the president will be addressing the nation so we'll keep watching that here from the white house team john roberts at the white house john mentioned that the president either has or will soon be expressing his condolences um to the leaders and people of israel and of course he'll be expressing his condolences to the families of the other astronauts all americans as we and the nation do and will be doing in the days that follow on the telephone with us now dr don parise two-time shuttle astronaut uh world renowned astronomer and uh dr parise and i do hope i pronounce your name correctly you knew some of today's astronauts well i knew uh two of them dan uh rick husband and uh kalpana challa were acquaintances of mine but of course and i had met all of them i had an experiment on this particular flight and when the entire flight crew came to the goddard space flight center to oversee some training on that experiment i had uh i've met all of them during that period of time dr parise there will be the inevitable questions revived now about why do humans in space why not do these experiments why not do this exploration uh by robot why put humans in space and this may be as good a time as they need to at least briefly review why we have it as a national purpose to explore space with humans well there's there's more to it than just the experiments that we do in space you know uh it's certainly true that many of the experiments that are done in a human tended manner on the space station or the space shuttle could have

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station or the space shuttle could have been done robotically but on the other hand as we look toward the distant future humans have always been explorers and uh if we think back in the earth's history in human history at all of the uh the changes that have occurred due to humans actually going and exploring places whether it's columbus making his way across the ocean to the united states or any of the other early explorers that that forged trade routes and so forth uh much of human history is uh is has been developed by the exploratory nature of us and and we continue to do that so it's not it's not only the the narrow-sided view of the particular experiments that could have been done on the ground instead of in space it's a it's a matter of gaining a lot of experience and and gaining the ability for humans to extend their presence beyond the earth as one who's done it twice what drives people what what motivates one to want to be an astronaut and to go through the long grueling training for just the chance just a chance that you'll be catapulted up there on

a catapult to the high frontier well i think it's the adventure and the excitement the the possibility of making some significant contribution to science and to uh and to the human uh capabilities in space and it's just it's exciting and and people like to do it i don't i don't know what else to say when you were aboard for re-entry on the two flights you were afraid can you tell us about that that part of the uh well the re-entry is actually

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actually very very smooth it's not uh you know there's not a whole lot going on at that point and particularly at the point where it appears that the columbia first started having difficulties [Music] that that point is sort of the transition uh point where it's not flying so much like a spacecraft anymore and it's flying more like an airplane as the as the atmospheric pressure outside builds uh sufficiently that the aerodynamic control surfaces start to become effective uh that's sort of the transition region there and it's not you know there's not a lot going on it's hard to imagine what sort of a catastrophic uh failure could have occurred then to to create what happened at that moment when you were aboard the shuttle twice at just about this time when you were over north texas were you thinking about possible death or thinking about with just a few short minutes from home uh well i didn't fly over texas both of my missions landed at edwards air force base but nevertheless at that point in the flight maybe 15 minutes before landing it's it's like you're on an airliner at that point and i was certainly not thinking of death i was thinking about getting a night's sleep because i had worked many hours before that and then had stayed up instead of going to bed as i would have normally been scheduled to in orbit then i was staying up for the entry and landing and was uh tired and looking forward to seeing my family and getting a good night's sleep as no doubt were these astronauts today who are now gone thank you dr don parise two-time shuttle astronaut who knew some of today's astronauts what you've been seeing as we were talking to dr parise for pictures from our papillion in dallas this debris which has been is my understanding

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which has been is my understanding confirmed as part of the shuttle's debris it's near fort worth texas these aerial shots of the debris and you can see how large of a smoke and scorched area this is by seeing get the comparison to the people who are walking around it this is from our dallas cbs news affiliate aerials of the debris on the ground now that was near fort worth and there have been confirmed now reports of debris found in uh east texas which shows you how far an area this debris is thrown over these are amateur pictures this amateur photograph this is the best photograph we've had the shuttle was flying along at 200 000 feet plus yes you're right this is the best incredible speed and let's just let the pictures speak themselves as of course it plummeted through the earth's atmosphere it was burning and this is the trail that it left our good friends in the director's booth will re-lack that video i think now the amateur photographer had the shuttle then saw sparking like a star trailing vapor and smoke pieces are flying off and see them off to the side and then they plummet to earth this one of the debris sites near fort worth texas and i was saying earlier russ mitchell that you see this debris site in fort west texas then hundreds of miles to the east

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texas then hundreds of miles to the east near nacogdoches over in the general area of the texas louisiana border all kinds of reports of debris there and nasa i don't know officially but people at nasa emphasize that there may be debris you know as far as louisiana perhaps arkansas it's just that it's going to be spread over a very wide area which again this is the third time i think at least third time we're showing you this amateur video that was taken i'm not quite sure from where this video was taken somewhere uh in north texas australia again authorities say if you come in contact with this don't touch it it can be very dangerous i think we want to go to bill harwood our cbs news space expert who's been so magnificent in reporting this story this morning there's no other word to describe before doing so i think that we should re-wrap that video

END